Big Ten Conference Women's Basketball Tournament

Thursday, March 5, 2026

Indianapolis, Indiana, USA

Gainbridge Fieldhouse

Oregon Ducks

Coach Kelly Graves

Katie Fiso

Avary Cain

Postgame Press Conference

Oregon - 73, Maryland - 68

THE MODERATOR: We want to welcome again Coach Kelly Graves, student-athletes Katie Fiso and Avary Cain. Coach, if you will make an opening statement.

KELLY GRAVES: What a great opponent we played tonight. Maryland, they're a great program. Brenda is one of my favorite coaches. I look up to her. I know that they're going to do great things in the NCAA Tournament.

I'm just excited that we're the ones moving on. It was a heck of a game. This late night deal, it's getting tough for a senior citizen like me.

I was just really proud of our team's effort, especially at the defensive end tonight. They just made one three. If you play Maryland, you've got to stop them from the 3-point line. Honestly, at halftime when our two leading scorers have a combined two points, just to be one point down at that point, I felt pretty good about our chances.

Then those two came out in the second half and played like we know they can. Then Avary, it wasn't just the last shot, it was several plays and several shots earlier in the game.

I'm just really happy for these guys. Glad to be moving on.

Q. Katie, can you speak to Avary's contributions? First half giving you guys some life there, and then just making that shot at the end, just what her contributions meant to you guys tonight?

KATIE FISO: She's a dog. She wants to win. She wants to compete. Having her hold us down that first half was amazing. It's just a testament to her work, her work ethic she puts in on and off the court trying to be better for this team.

I'm just proud of her. The sky's the limit for her. Continue to grow on that and just keep killing, man.

AVARY CAIN: Thanks, Katie.

Q. Last time you all played Maryland, in Maryland you had a 24-11 fourth quarter to come away with the win. Tonight it's a 21-11 fourth quarter to come away with the win. What is it just kind of that added motivation in the fourth quarter against a team like Maryland, who is not known for kind of relenting at the end of games?

AVARY CAIN: I think for us we're kind of known as the -- what's it, cardiac team?

KATIE FISO: Cardiac.

AVARY CAIN: I think this game we came out guns a-blazing, and we're kind of saying this whole tournament we've got to treat this game like it's our last, especially in this tournament.

So I think just treating every possession like it is our last and playing as hard as we can and not taking anything for granted.

So I think that was something we kind of took to heart, and I think it translated on the court.

Q. This was a total team effort in this game. Can you speak to how Ari and Sofia complemented your team tonight?

KATIE FISO: Great question. They do all the little work that doesn't get on the stat sheet. They're diving at all those balls. They're creating havoc on defense, guarding the best players. They're doing all the little work.

Then their contribution to the team is amazing. We wouldn't be this great of a team without those two. Yeah, just proud of them.

Q. Katie, right out of halftime, I think there was like eight to ten points right away. What was your mentality coming out of the halftime break to make an impact on the game?

KATIE FISO: Obviously I started the game off a little cold, shots weren't falling, but trying to do the other things, helping my teammates, encouraging them.

Then in the second half I started to get more downhill, started to be more aggressive, pushing in transition, just going back to the things I'm good at.

Q. Avary, can you just break down that final shot and kind of what it means to you to move on here in the tournament?

AVARY CAIN: Honestly, like I still haven't really kicked it in yet, the feeling. I think it's just a testament to Katie. Everybody's looking at her at the end of the clock, so kind of just staying ready in that. I think that's kind of what led me to be so open because everyone's looking at Katie.

So I was kind of like just stay behind and make sure she's ready to pass to me. I think that's just a testament to her and her hard work and how good she is with the ball and how many eyes are on her when it gets to that. Just staying ready.

Yeah, the feeling hasn't kicked in yet, but I'm sure it will later.

Q. Avary, I'm just going to press you on that a little bit. When you join a program, when you're new to a program, what does it mean -- can you find some words to describe what it means to make a contribution like that, making a shot like that in a moment to help your team advance?

AVARY CAIN: There's so many words to describe it, but I think I just -- just the confidence that the team gives me is amazing. Everyone's just telling me to stay ready and be ready obviously. I haven't put that many points up on the games, but I think just staying ready and helping my team as much as I can.

I'm not all about me and thing like that. We talk about sometimes me, but always us. I think just staying ready, like I said, but also everyone gives me so much confidence, especially the coaches, Kelly, everybody else on the staff. Yeah, just the confidence they give me coming into this program is super amazing, and I can't be more thankful for that.

Q. Can you speak a little bit more, your thoughts at halftime, when Katie and Ehis only have a couple points between them. Is there a thought like, uh-oh, they're going to take those two out of the game completely and we're going to have to find ways to do it, or is there confidence that, no, they're going to get it going and hopefully we're going to be okay?

KELLY GRAVES: A little bit of both. I actually felt encouraged knowing those two would turn it around to some degree. I thought Maryland did a really great job on Ehis. They made it really difficult for her. They were really physical with her. Every time she got an offensive rebound, they swarmed her. You could tell that was the game plan.

She's such a great player. We tried to move her around a little bit. She did get out in the open court to where she's very capable and facing the hoop and attacking a little bit. We tried to get her away from the rim. I think we did struggle to get it inside to her from time to time. We were kind of forcing it.

Then honestly late in the game, we just went with a lot of middle ball screen action with Ehis and Katie and let Katie create. That's what she does best. She forced a couple of shots, I thought, but at the same time, on that last one, she made the right play, the right kick out.

To score two points in the first half and 32 in the second just goes to show you what great players they are.

Q. That fourth quarter, again, another like a mirror image of the last time you all played Maryland. Can you talk about your team's just fight in that final quarter and kind of looking past being down?

KELLY GRAVES: We talked to the team about playing with house money today, and the pressure was going to be on the higher seed, as it always is. If you can keep it close in those kind of moments, that pressure heightens a little bit, and our kids just kind of played loose.

We won the game at the defensive end, to be honest with you. They're such a great offensive team. In both games we held them in the 60s. In fact, the 61 points we held them to in college park is the lowest they've scored this season.

We were doing it with the defense. Yeah, we just -- if you've watched our team this year, you would know that this is kind of how all our games go, up-and-down, it's a roller coaster ride. We have huge deficits. But oftentimes we find a way to win it. For me, it's old hat. This is who they are.

Q. We talk about the Magic of March a lot of the time, but there's no place where you're going to play this many games in this quick of succession. How do you leverage adrenaline and momentum when there's sometimes the temptation to think, oh, gosh, third game in three days?

KELLY GRAVES: Well, that's going to be tough, especially against a team now that's been resting for a couple of days, but they earn that spot. You have an 18-game schedule to figure that out. We've just got to do the best we can.

This morning we let them sleep in until 11:00. That's the nice thing about these late games. That's a long day and a lot of time to rest. We didn't use our shootaround. We won't tomorrow as well. They've just got to rest up as much as possible.

We've got a great training staff. Our kids are smart, they're competitive. They know how to take care of their bodies. We'll just do the best we can to manage one more game. That's all we're guaranteed.

Q. Tongue in cheek followup, but does that kind of speak to maybe eliminating shootarounds moving forward, or is that a short-term thing?

KELLY GRAVES: You know, sleeping in is always a good plan for life. You know what, yes, I'll champion that. I love it.

The West Coast time is really a thing, and with the 9:00 a.m. shootaround, which is the slot they gave us. I'm in no way -- I tweeted out today, and some people took it as I was taking a shot. No, I wasn't, but the reality is it's 6:00 a.m., and our body clocks are just not ready for that. I don't think the half hour you get on the court is not that important quite frankly.

We have a nice open space in the hotel we can use to diagram their plays and work on it. I think at this point we know what they do, they know what we do, and we've got to tough it out and play a great game.

Michigan is so good. We had an all time great game with them at our place, a double overtime. I don't think either team played great, but it was a close game throughout. Yeah, they're a great team. Certainly, a candidate to win it all or certainly get in the Final Four.

Q. You are no stranger to coaching versatile, strong point guards, Courtney VanderSloot comes to mind. Can you speak about what characteristics Katie has had in these past two games that has her with that versatile guard play and strong?

KELLY GRAVES: That's a great question. And don't forget Sabrina Ionescu. She was a decent point guard as well. Katie has the same kind of makeup. She wants the ball when the game is on the line just like those other two did. I think she's closer to Courtney in her ability in transition and things like that. She's a scoring guard.

Courtney, people forget, with all the assists she's gotten, she was a heck of a scorer in college as well. Sabrina did it with guile, strength, craftiness, and all the other stuff that comes with it, was a better shooter than Katie. I'm just blessed to coach. Can you imagine that? Ten years in my career, I've had those three guards to carry me.

But she's just a competitive kid, she is. She loves the game. Plays with great joy, just like those other two. Her teammates really respect her. She's young, just a sophomore. She commands the huddle. She commands practice. There's no question who our alpha is.

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THE MODERATOR: From Maryland we have Coach Brenda Frese and student-athlete Oluchi Okananwa. Coach, if you could make an opening statement.

BRENDA FRESE: I thought two great teams that played their hearts out. You're going to see that in March. They just made a few more plays than we did late game that sent us home.

I thought we came out early, we weathered the storm. We were really aggressive to start the first quarter and did a decent job, especially against their big two in the first half, holding them to two points.

Second half was a tale of two halves, and they got hot. And we had an uncharacteristic shooting night, when, again, you go 1 for 14 from the 3-point line.

I thought Oluchi did as much as she could being able to carry this team. I thought our freshmen gained some really valuable experience. All these lessons that will help us being able to get out of here, out of the Big Ten and be able to play someone new.

Just proud of the fact that we competed as hard as we could for 40 minutes.

Q. Oluchi, can you talk me through the emotions of losing a conference tournament game. It's a bit of an odd situation because you know you have the NCAA Tournament coming up in your case, but there's a certain finality to it at the end of conference play. What does it feel like for you now, and how are you going to try to move on in the next few weeks?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Disappointing. This definitely was not the outcome that any of us wanted. I think Coach really -- she said it. We just have to learn from our mistakes. We have to learn from this loss.

At the end of the day it happened. There's no way for us to reverse the clock. It's either we use it or we sink in.

Q. Oluchi, it's been a great year for you this year, transferring in obviously from Duke. Can you just kind of talk about if there were any differences you noticed from having played two years of ACC basketball to now playing a full year of Big Ten basketball and how that might have pushed you to improve your game in certain areas?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: The Big Ten is one of the best conferences in the country hands down, no question about it. I've had no choice but to grow offensively, defensively, just holistically as a basketball player because every night we're going against some of the best girls in the country.

So it's been really valuable for me.

Q. Late in the game obviously it felt like you were trying to carry the team and get a few layups to tie the game. Can you just break down what was going through your head in that scenario trying to tie the game?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: Just be aggressive, be my normal self. A lot of good things happen for me when I drive, whether it's me getting to the line or finishing with a bucket. That was my mentality, just be aggressive.

Q. You've had this experience before in postseason play and conference play with ACC. How do you kind of take last year's winning experience, this year's loss together and carry that into the NCAA and also prep your younger classmen who haven't had this yet?

OLUCHI OKANANWA: I don't know. I don't think much about last season. I'm just so in the present with this team and where we are right now. Like I said, what's happened has happened, and I really do feel like we are going to use this as fuel for the NCAA.

Q. You've talked a lot about how to -- like over the

course of the season, just the development of experience and the team always kind of being right there but not being able to finish. I know we talked earlier about being able to play 40 full minutes of basketball as a key component there. If you're able just for a second to think big picture about where this team started at the beginning of the year and where they are now; can you talk about that process and the growth of this journey to that point?

BRENDA FRESE: Absolutely. When you look out on the floor, oftentimes we're playing two or three freshmen that are out there. Isi for the first time as a junior, her first experience. A lot of lessons.

We've gone through a lot of adversity this season. We've continued to grow as a team and continue to get better every single time.

It's kind of been very rewarding as coaches to be able to see their chemistry and their camaraderie come together because I think a lot of people counted this team out.

Q. Late in the game you had three timeouts; you decided not to use them. Obviously that kind of backfired with them hitting the three at the end. Didn't really have much to do there. Just break down that decision and why you decided not to call a timeout there.

BRENDA FRESE: We talked about it. Obviously they had the ball. We couldn't call a timeout because we were on the defensive end. I thought the one that I was considering calling, Oluchi was in transition so I wasn't -- I knew what she looks like. That was about the point when I was going to call one.

Her in the open court, I'm going to take any day, and I would have thought she would have been able to be able to finish that. It was really kind of how it played out and unfolded.

Q. Last time whenever Oregon came to College Park, kind of a similar fourth quarter. What did you see Oregon doing so well in the late game stages last time and then tonight?

BRENDA FRESE: Sadly it felt kind of like deja vu. Their big two took over in the second half, obviously, as you saw. Then almost eerie, very similar of helping off the wrong players, some basic rules defensively we have. That's pressure, right?

In times of pressure, whether you revert back or you stay true to who you are. I think you just saw Oregon's experience kind of play out a little bit stronger than what we were able to do.

Q. We're going to find out soon who the host sites are going to be for the first round. If you had to make a pitch to the committee despite the loss of why you think your resume is good enough to host, why would that be?

BRENDA FRESE: Again, it shouldn't be judged off of one game. I think our conference prepares you night in and night out. We've seen that, being in the best conference in the country. I think you should be rewarded for your body of work.

When you look at we've had six Quad 1 wins, five that have been on the road. This was a Quad 1 game, even though Oregon was an 11 seed in the tournament. So they're still a top 25 NET team. Just the competition we've been able to face night in and night out.

Q. On that last possession, there was a four or five second differential, and you opted to let it play out instead of fouling. What were you looking at there and hoping to get out of that?

BRENDA FRESE: After we called the timeout? You know, it was a possession. They were hitting free throws. I didn't feel good about -- I trusted our defense we were going to be able to get a stop, especially having that many timeouts available. I trusted that we were going to be able to get a stop defensively because they hit a lot of free throws tonight.

Q. I wanted to check in on Addi a little bit. We didn't see her as much the second half. Was that a game time call there and a little more on her?

BRENDA FRESE: I thought Kyndal in the second half just commanded things a little bit more. Again, we're playing with two freshmen point guards. I thought where Kyndal came in and kind of settled us on the offensive end and ran some really great things. Defensively I just thought she was the better matchup tonight.

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